

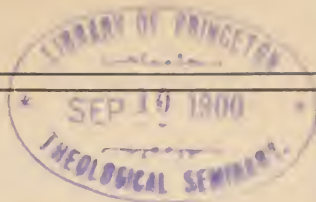
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# The Arabian Mission

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Quarterly Letters from the Field

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Number Thirty-four, April to June, 1900

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## Bahrein

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# THE ARABIAN MISSION.

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# QUARTERLY LETTERS FROM THE ARABIAN MISSION

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April-June, 1900.

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BAHREIN.

*Some Notes of  
Praise.*

Since the account of a journey will take up most of the space allowed for our letter, we can only jot down at the start a few notes of other happenings, all of which give us cause for thanksgiving at the close of this quarter. After some delay our newly leased house was ready for occupation and, on April 16th, we left the old house without regret for a better and more comfortable dwelling. All our household stuff was moved without mishap, and for every purpose of our work we are pleased with the new location. From April 1st to June 30th, 933 patients received treatment in the dispensary, and many heard repeatedly the message of Christ's love from the lips of Gibrail, our assistant. Our little school, organized and directed by Mrs. Zwemer, flourishes and may grow like the mustard-seed. A poor woman, rescued from her husband's cruel blows, learned to love the gospel, and now comes regularly to read with Nejma, the daughter of Ameen, whose family, you remember, are staying with us. We were glad to hear of Ameen's safety in his exile, from long-delayed letters. Their contents prove that his faith abides strong. Mrs. Zwemer was seriously ill for over three weeks, during my absence on tour, with fevers; her strength has not yet returned, but her life was spared. Our helpers also have been on the sick-list, but are now all at work. Mr. Wiersum is so busily

employed with the new tongue that he finds no time for a letter to you now. At the present rate of progress he may write you an Arabic one before long.

*All aboard  
for Oman.*

It had long ago been my desire to visit the Oman coast, but since it is only possible to reach the towns in Western Oman, from Bahrein, by native boat, opportunities are irregular and often dubious. Twice before I started on the trip, only to be turned back by adverse wind and weather. On May 9th, a colporteur and I put our two chests of books and medicines on board of a small *sambook*, and at four o'clock the wind was favorable to leave harbor. The captain and crew of the boat were all strict Wahabis, and made no secret of the fact that formerly they were slave-traders; even now an occasional bargain in human flesh enriches the Oman trader. We sailed due east to avoid the shoals and rocks of the Arab coast, and on the 11th were off Hindarabi and the famous old town of Siraf on the Persian coast. From there we put into the harbor of Kalaat-el-Abd to be safe from a strong northerly gale. Here we went on shore and had a talk with the people; nearly all of the Persians on the coast understand Arabic. Then our boat sailed across the Gulf direct for Sharkeh. Half way across is the small island of Abu Moosa, with a small Arab population under the rule of Sheikh Salim. The island, though rocky, has splendid pasturage and good water. There is a harbor on the eastern side, with good anchorage very close to the shore. The chief and only export of the islet is red-oxide, of which there are two hills with a boundless supply. Steamers occasionally call here for this cheap, marketable ballast. Even this out-of-the-way place has now the witness of the Gospel in their own tongue. On Monday, May 14th, we reached Sharkeh, the chief town on the Pirate Coast. At the house of Abd el Latif, the

*Life on the  
Pirate Coast.*

British agent, we found hospitality, and during the seven days of our stay a mat-hut was our dispensary and reception-room. Here Arabs came freely to get medicines, buy books, or discuss the reason of our errand. Many were the talks, during those busy days, with all sorts and conditions of men. Reading the Scriptures, proving a doctrine, or answering objections, there was often no rest until long after sunset. And no sooner had the muezzin called to daylight prayer than the visitors began to arrive again. The Arabs at Sharkeh

and the other coast-towns are as notorious now for immorality as they were once for piracy. No part of Arabia that I have visited can vie with this coast in the coarseness of talk and the looseness of morals. The population is nearly one-half negro or of negro descent and, in spite of all assertions to the contrary, the trade in slaves is still carried on secretly. Most of them belong to the Wahabi sect, who abominate the weed, but tobacco smoking is generally permitted. One day we met the Sheikh of Bereimy, a large town four days journey inland. He was an intelligent Arab, and in speaking about Christianity expressed a desire to hear what our prayers were like. I repeated Psalm fifty-one and also the sixteenth Psalm, with which he was pleased. He took with him a large Arabic Bible, and invited us to come to his country for a visit.

While I was employed with patients, Elias, the colporteur, canvassed the town and the villages adjacent. One day we went on donkeys to Debai, twelve miles distant; we made the mistake of taking along only thirty-five portions of Scripture, and these were sold before noon. At Sharkeh the people were friendly enough to ask us to rent a shop and remain with them permanently.

All along the coast there is a splendid field for colporteur work, and a medical missionary would make his journey free of charge, as the people are very willing to pay for treatment, and some of them are wealthy. The chief trade of this region is in pearls; others have inherited riches from their forebears who made their fortunes when the Zanzibar slave trade was brisk.

It has long been our wish to explore the region between Bahrein and Muscat, and to see what field or opportunity the region north of the Batinah afforded for mission work. So, after considerable difficulty in bargaining with camel-drivers, we secured two Bedouin companions and five camels to take us from Sharkeh to Sohar for the sum of twenty *rials*, or Arabian dollars; equivalent to only ten American dollars. At 9 P. M., May 20th, we left and, after a short rest at midnight to water the camels at a well, marched until 9 o'clock the next morning. Travelling as much as possible by night to avoid the sun, and resting during the day under some acacia tree or in the shadow of a Bedouin fort, we completed the distance of ninety miles in a little over four days. But it was by *forcep*

*A Camel Journey  
Across the  
Mountains.*

marches, for we were anxious to get to Muscat in time to catch the mail steamer to Bahrein. A large part of the way was barren desert, with no villages, or even encampments. Our course was nearly east at first, then southeast to reach the pass of Wady Hitta. The more usual pass across the coast range of mountains is that of Wady Hom, but this was deemed unsafe at the time. We passed villages and cultivated fields—the second day—*Filaj*, *Fulaij* and *Athan*. That night we slept in the bed of the Wady, surrounded by thousands of sheep and goats, driven in by Bedouin lasses from many pastures on the mountain-slopes. Even among the Bedouin we found readers, and Elias sold books at every place where the camels kneeled. It was late on Wednesday night, May 23d, that we entered the narrow pass of Hitta. Our Bedouin guides preceded, each on a camel, with their rifles loaded and cocked; then followed the baggage camel, to which my beast was "towed," and, in similar fashion, Elias on the milch camel, followed by its two colts. We were not troubled with the heat at night, finding the mountain air cold enough for blankets. During the daytime the heat was intense, but the air was dry and we protected ourselves by wet towels under our sun hats. On May 23d a simoom was blowing, and it was refreshing to come to an oasis in the middle of the stony desert pass, where water burst from a big spring and trees and flowers grew in luxury.

Just at the top of the pass is Ajeeb, a large village with tobacco plantations and date orchards. The view down the mountains, over the fertile Batinah that stretches all the way to Muscat, and out over the Indian Ocean, was grand. We followed Wady Hitta to the sea, and the turbulent mountain stream dwindled to a brook and at last ebbed away into the ocean, a tiny rivulet of fresh water. These perennial streams are the secret of the fertile coast all the way from Wady Ham to Birka. At Shinas, on the sea, we spent a hot day; resting first in the mosque and and afterward in the small bazaar. In both places we sold Scriptures. One man took us to his hut and offered us hospitality; he remembered Peter Zwemer's visit three years ago. From Shinas we went on our camels to Sohar. At the large village, El Wa (Lawa on some maps), we were unable to stop, as our Arab companions were afraid of small-pox, which was prevalent there. At Sohar we were hospitably received by the Wali, who rules the town for the Sultan of Muscat. Here we obtained a boat for the

remainder of our journey, and expected to reach Muscat in a couple of days. But we were sorely disappointed. *Trying to raise a wind.* Our boatmen first delayed a whole day at Saham, and then, for three long days, we had winds dead ahead, with a strong counter current, so that even rowing proved impossible. Once we landed at Khadra, near Suwaik, and tried to bargain for camels to get to Muscat, but the price asked was extortionate. It was hard to make the Arabs understand that we knew for a certainty the day of the fortnightly mail's departure from Muscat. They said, "Inshallah, the captain will be late or will know of your coming and wait for you!" Late on Tuesday night a fair breeze sprang up and, with all sails set, we reached the island Fahl, ten miles from Muscat at two o'clock on Wednesday. The wind utterly ceased, and we saw the mail steamer sail into the harbor! For the sum of four rupees, however, the men offered to row us to the steamer, the ten miles. It was a long pull and a strong pull, but they worked lustily, and we sang to keep them at it. Our two boxes were up on the gang-way and we had half an hour on shore with Mr. Cantine; then we returned to Bahrein. I do not think a meal ever tasted so well or a steamer-bunk ever felt so soft as they did on the British India steamer after three weeks "roughing it" in Oman.

*Open Doors  
in Oman.*

Nothing impressed us so much on our tour of exploration as the fine opportunities now open for colporteur work and evangelistic touring all over Oman. Nowhere did we meet with fanaticism. Everywhere there was a demand for books. The women even left their huts to run after the man with the Arabic books and bargain for a two-cent gospel. We heard that the caravan-routes were safe in the Zahirah as well as along the Batinah. If this be so, there are fifty more villages where our colporteurs can carry the Bible, from Bereimy to Obra and Muskin; all virgin territory untouched by those who have penetrated into the Jebel Achdar from Muscat. Then there is Wady Jazi, due west from Sohar, celebrated for its fertility, and with a large population; here too, is a new route for the gospel in Oman. Now is the time to seize this golden opportunity; it may not last long. Pray for this part of our field which, more than any other, is sacred through the suffering and death of missionaries who laid down their lives to open Oman for Christ.

S. M. ZWEMER.

## MUSCAT.

*Social  
Opportunities.*

It may be thought that a missionary with strong social instincts and fondness for society is thereby handicapped in a mission such as ours where there is so much isolation. I believe it to be the reverse. Few races can be reached so easily and are so responsive to a genuine friendly interest as the Arab, and most of our visible results in the past can be traced to our personal influence. A real enjoyment of social intercourse with the natives is necessary if one is to be a success in this field. If it is not natural then it must be acquired.

The ease with which our work at Muscat was inaugurated, and the assured position of respect which it speedily attained, was, without doubt, largely due to the social gifts of Peter Zwemer and his wise use of them. The present missionary in charge has to acknowledge his remissness in following up this method of work so successfully used by his predecessors. Perhaps the care of the freed-slave school, or the supervision of repairs and additions to the Mission house may form some excuse, but early in the quarter the writer determined that *this* report must embody the account of new touring and visiting. But alas, delays in building and the early advent of the hot season prevented all but some short excursions to neighboring villages. One was to Mutra the sister town of Muscat. The Wali, or governor, had been very friendly before he was promoted to his present position, and now was insistent that I should come over and partake of his hospitality. If I relate to you a bit of my experience you may judge if, to thoroughly enjoy it, one must not be well equipped with various Christian virtues.

*Arab Hospitality  
at Mutra.*

My good servant Ali,—I should say *our*, for he has been with the mission for years,—is my prompter in all social functions. So, taking him with me, we set out by boat, expecting to arrive shortly before the usual mid-day meal. We found our host in the midst of the day's business, with a motley crowd of Arabs of all degrees around him. We had a hearty welcome, and an adjoining room was swept out and mats put down, to which we and the more honorable part of his following were invited. Coffee and sherbet followed, with the inevitable Muscat "helwa," a sort of sticky, greasy mass, from which you must pull a bit with your fingers. There were no

cigarettes, as most of the Muscat Arabs belong to sects which condemn smoking. After a time came fresh figs, and after a longer time a watermelon cut into small bits. In the intervals conversation flourished spasmodically, my host being busy and the others also having matters of business to settle among themselves, or by turns putting themselves under the hands of a barber or lying down to sleep. It was a hot day and the room small and close, and I wanted badly to sleep myself, but managed to save my dignity. The melons I had hoped might be the last of the entertainment, but when I finally saw the servant hurrying in from the market with a couple of chickens I knew the real feature of the day was yet to come. It was thoroughly welcome when it did appear, though I was sorry at having to eat alone, my host excusing himself on the ground that he must not leave his other guests. The real reason, I think, was that he did not feel equal to attempting the use of the spoons and forks which he evidently had just bought for the occasion.

After eating and washing the real social hour began. A number of books were brought in, among which was a copy of Proverbs, which was commended to the audience as containing much wisdom. This gave me the opportunity of speaking about some Bible truths, and then I in turn was invited to listen to some of their great poets. Much of it I could not understand, but the beauties of their diction are undeniable. I have often wished that the Bible had been translated, at least parts of it, into a poetic form, instead of its present prosaic reading, which, for a religious book, can scarcely commend itself to a Moslem hearer. A professional reciter of poetry was also called in. Some of his selections, running back they said over eight hundred years, were a real treat, even to such an untrained ear as mine. It was well on towards sundown when we were finally escorted to our boat, physically tired, but confident that we had been doing real mission work and that, on the whole, it had been a pleasure to us.

*A Call Upon  
the Sultan's  
Brother.*

On another occasion I had a pleasant time with the Sultan's brother. There is the usual oriental jealousy and fear between them,—it is said that they never see each other except in the presence of their followers, all armed,—and the absence of the Sultan on a journey was my opportunity for calling at his brother's palace. He is better educated than the Sultan himself, and had displayed in a

prominent place in his reception room a copy of the Bible and New Testament. He evidently wished to impress me with his open-mindedness, but from his conversation it was evident that his acquaintance with the contents of the books was very slight. In all such social intercourse it is very easy to introduce religious subjects, especially if one has a good store of quotations from the Bible at one's command ; and when, as is often the case, we meet each other face to face with no listening attendants, there is the very best opportunity for speaking of our Lord and Master. Can we measure the possible blessing, if with love and knowledge we are faithful in using our common every-day opportunities !

*Two Weeks at  
Bahrein.*

This brief letter is being written as I am returning to Muscat after enjoying a two weeks' visit at Bahrein. The hospitality of our missionaries here has been as gracious as that of the Arabs, with none of its fatiguing features. It has been a pleasure and a stimulus to notice the spirit and push with which their work is being carried on, and the great advance noticeable since my last visit three years ago. I trust we soon can feel that the good seed has been as widely sown in Oman as at our middle station. When Mr. Wiersum follows me, as he soon hopes to do, we will, under God's favor be able to realize some of our hopes.

JAMES CANTINE.

*BUSRAH.*

*House Repairs.*

As I am writing this there is much noise overhead, tramping of feet and pounding and scraping of shovels. It is caused by the laborers removing the nearly foot-thick layer of earth from the roof, preparatory to replacing some of the broken beams. Thus the promises first given a year ago to carry out certain repairs are beginning to be fulfilled. It was a trial of patience, especially during the last few months, for the missionary in charge to go to the landlord several times a week, and regularly receive excuses for past failures to keep his word and new promises for the future. Some of the repairs that we have been waiting for are for our comfort, while others are for our safety. The house we are in is a very old one, and it is to be hoped that, when the work going on now is finished, there will not be occasion soon for further repairs, as the tax on the time and energy of those concerned is serious.

*Hopeful Work  
for Women.*

About four months ago a beginning was made of work among the women of Busrah, and the results have been very pleasing. Hannah, the mother of our colporteur Micha, a godly woman, was engaged to visit the women in their homes. She has been doing this until a few weeks ago, when she had to stop her work in order to nurse a sick relative. In general she found the three classes that such workers find everywhere,—the hostile, the indifferent, and such as gladly received her. The pleasing feature of the attempt was that the number of the latter class was, relatively, so large, larger, in fact, than we had expected; showing us again that a door for the entrance of the Gospel was open wider than our weak faith suffered us to see. How strange the work of this woman seems to these people is shown by the fact that numbers of times she was offered money, after conversing and reading from the Scriptures, “for opening the Book.” These poor people, who had never known anyone to be interested in their spiritual welfare, could not understand why this woman came to them to speak of God and His Book—they thought it could only be for money. They have yet to learn that our Gospel is free, that we would give it to them freely as it has been provided for them and for us, “without money and without price.” This beginning was made as an experiment, and the experiment shows plainly that there is a good field in Busrah for women’s work. Where is the consecrated worker that will come to help carry on this noble work? Should this fall into the hands of anyone that may be considering such a call as this, let her be sure of consecration, for nothing short of the grace of God will enable anyone to enter some of these wretched huts; but let such a one be confident of magnificent opportunities of service.

*Touring  
around  
Busrah.*

In this quarter a number of tours were made from this station. In the first place, Kuweit, the rumored terminus on the Persian Gulf of the Metsopotmian Railway, was visited. The dispensary assistant with a colporteur were sent. The tour demonstrated several things in regard to work at that place, viz.; that as a field for colporteurs it seems not to be very promising, as the degree of illiteracy is great, but that a doctor could, without much difficulty, open up regular work by overcoming some prejudices against the “Unbelievers,” and that a medical man could go into the Nejd from there probably as far as he wished too. Another

tour was that to Nasariyeh, by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This was made by the colporteur Yakoub Sawa with good success. He was able to sell a goodly number of Scriptures, but what was especially reassuring was that he found the seed that has been scattered for several years in this region is bearing fruit.

*A Blade  
of Green.*

At a certain place which has always been described by those visiting it as a hard one, one man was found making earnest inquiries after the truth. Unfortunately the place is far from here and difficult of access, so that it is hard to help him. At several other places, also, along this somewhat beaten track, this colporteur reports interesting conversations about the "Prophet Esa." Within the last few weeks the places nearby, Zobeir and Abul Khasib, have been visited with a fair amount of success. The former place has a bad report for fanaticism, and it was almost impossible to get anyone to go there. As this favorable start has now been made, I trust that the place will remain open to our colporteurs. The hot weather is upon us now, and touring is done at great risk of health. With the cooler weather we hope to push this phase of our work again.

FRED. J. BARNY.

*A vacation trip  
to Bagdad.*

The first of the quarter we went to Bagdad for a change, and returned much benefited by the trip, especially Mrs. Thoms, and with some new ideas for work gained from seeing their most excellent medical work there. The C. M. S. has two dispensaries and two well-equipped doctors. One of them, having worked in Bagdad fourteen years, has, of course, had much experience that would help a man very much.

While in Bagdad, I took a trip with Dr. Sturrock to the ruins of Babylon, and enjoyed it very much. Although there was not much to be seen, can you imagine my feelings as I stood in the palace of Belshazzar, or in the temple of Baal?

So thorough was the destruction of the city by the Persians that nothing is to be seen but fragments of foundations, walls and streets. The German Government is excavating Babylon, and one may get an idea of the amount of debris that was necessary to be removed when he reads that Alexander the Great, in trying to fulfill his promise of rebuilding the "Temple of Baal," employed 10,000 men for two months, and did not succeed in removing the debris from about this one building. This was in the fourth

century, B. C. What must have been the task in this century, after the accumulations of the centuries between !

*Babylon's Ruins.* At Niffur, where the Americans are excavating under the direction of Dr. Hilprecht, of the University of Pennsylvania, we had the pleasure of being entertained and shown about by the Doctor who, unlike so many of our learned professors, takes great pleasure in substantiating the Bible by what he finds. He thinks he has found sufficient evidence, from the many tablets found here, that Niffur was the place to which the Jews were sent at the time of the "Captivity." Here he has found inscriptions the dates of which he places at B. C. 3,800 years.

Summer is again upon us with a daily temperature of 104 in the shade. Next month we shall probably have an average maximum temperature of about 112 degrees. All at Busrah Station are keeping quite well, except for "prickly heat," from which the babies have already begun to suffer.

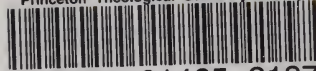
*The Dispensary.* Patients begin to come in shortly after sunrise each morning. Last week I treated two hundred. I think there will be about the same number this week. I hope to tell you more about some of them sometime. I trust you are all praying that some of the seed sown each day in the dispensary may fall on good ground. SHARON J. THOMS.

NOTE.—*Quarterly Letters from the Arabian Mission.*—We shall be very grateful if friends will do what they can to increase the circulation of the Quarterly Letters, as by this means a wider interest in the needs of Arabia will be aroused and the circle of prayer for the Arabs be enlarged. Will you not send your copy, after reading it, to someone else? The missionaries desire to express their thanks to the friends, especially the unknown friends, who are sending so many papers and magazines to our stations. We appreciate the kindness, and when the occupants of the mission house have gleaned the news and read that which amuses or instructs, the papers are sent on a second errand to the few English readers among the native population.





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